

## COMBINATION PLAYHOUSE AND DOLL CARRYING CASE

### SPECIFICATION

#### Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to playhouses such as dollhouses and particularly to those utilized in providing a storage or carrying case for associated equipment and toys.

#### Background of the Invention

Dollhouses and other similar playhouses are well known and extremely popular in the toy art. Many dollhouses are sized and configured for cooperative play with small dolls or toy figures as well as suitably scaled accessories. For example, published U.S. Patent application U.S. 2001/0034183A1 in the name of Brownrigg sets forth a MODULAR HOUSE TOY comprising a plurality of stacked room modules in the form of open-sided boxes. The plurality of modules includes a triangular peak module and open deck modules. The accessories include a planar cloth mat upon which the toy house is situated. The planar cloth mat simulates a backyard environment such as lawn, patio and pool environments.

British patent application 2,359,032 filed on behalf of Maiwald sets forth a MODULAR DOLL'S HOUSE constructed from a skeleton comprising floors, ceilings and pillars. Openings are provided in the skeleton between adjacent pillars while floor and ceiling surfaces are adapted to receive removable panels having wall surfaces and accessories such as windows or doors.

British patent application 2,049,447 filed on behalf of Dup pawhyte sets forth a COLLAPSIBLE AND SELF-ERECTING MODEL BUILDING formed of a base supporting a plurality of hinged panels which, in their raised position, define a playhouse enclosure and which lie flat in a closed position for storage etc.

European patent application 0,555,188A1 filed on behalf of Borgatta sets forth a TOY HOUSE FOLDABLE IN THE FORM OF A SUITCASE having a generally rectangular main body to which a plurality of panels are hingedly secured. The hinged panels may be folded to an open configuration providing a playhouse environment or folded to a closed configuration providing a closed suitcase-like structure.

German patent DE3343098A1 issued to Giessler sets forth a display case having a generally rectangular shape and forming a plurality of internal open-sided compartments within its interior. The compartments receive and store various toy articles in a visible relationship to the container.

British patent application 2,159,425A filed on behalf of Shikano sets forth a TOY HOUSE having two frame members connected so as to be capable of being opened to a first position for play activities and to be closed in a second configuration to provide a closed case. The frame and wall members are foldable to facilitate the two configurations of the toy house.

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In a different technology generally related to the present invention, a plurality of apparatus have been provided which make use of a flexible sealed generally planar pouch of plastic material or the like. Such devices utilize a transparent side to reveal a quantity of liquid captivated within the pouch. Examples of such apparatus are found in U.S. Patent 4,834,688 issued to Jones; U.S. Patent 4,738,888 issued to Pantaleo, et al.; U.S. Patent 5,256,457 also issued to Pantaleo, et al.; U.S. Patent 5,104,699 also issued to Pantaleo, et al., and U.S. Patent 5,656,341 issued to Pantaleo.

Notwithstanding the development and creation of the above-described prior art devices, there remains nonetheless a continuing need in the art for evermore improved, interesting and innovative playhouses for dolls and other articles.

#### Summary of the Invention

Accordingly, it is a general object of the present invention to provide an improved playhouse. It is a more particular object of the present invention to provide an improved playhouse which facilitates configuration from a storage or carrying arrangement suitable for

carrying dolls and small accessories to a novel play environment having additional amusement features.

In accordance with the present invention, there is provided a combination playhouse and carrying case comprising: a base housing defining a plurality of open-sided rooms; a front panel having a sealed pouch formed by a pair of flexible material sheets and a quantity of captive liquid therebetween; and a hinge securing the front panel to the base housing allowing the front panel to be moved to a closed position providing closure of the open-sided rooms and an open position, the liquid and the sealed pouch simulating a waterfront in the open position.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

The features of the present invention, which are believed to be novel, are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. The invention, together with further objects and advantages thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in the several figures of which like reference numerals identify like elements and in which:

Figure 1 sets forth a perspective view of the present invention combination playhouse and doll carrying case in its closed configuration;

Figure 2 sets forth a perspective view of the present invention combination playhouse and doll carrying case in its open or play configuration; and

Figure 3 sets forth a section view of the liquid pouch portion of the present invention combination playhouse and doll carrying case taken along section lines 3-3 in Figure 2.

#### Description of the Preferred Embodiment

By way of overview, Figures 1 and 2 set forth respective closed configuration and open configuration perspective views of the present invention combination playhouse. By way of further overview, the present invention combination playhouse is utilized as a storage and transport apparatus when in the closed configuration of Figure 1 and is used as a play environment and doll playhouse when in the open configuration of Figure 2. The transition from closed configuration to open configuration is provided by the pivotal or hinged attachment of the front panel of the present invention playhouse. By way of further overview and in accordance with an important aspect of the present invention, the front panel of the present invention combination playhouse and doll carrying case comprises a transparent plastic pouch partially filled with a quantity of captive liquid.

More specifically, a combination playhouse and doll carrying case constructed in accordance with the present invention is generally referenced by numeral 10. Playhouse 10 includes a generally rectangular base housing 11 having a pair of vertical sides 13 and 14 together

with a bottom surface 12 and a rear surface 15. Base housing 11 further includes a top surface 16 which supports a carrying handle 20. Top surface 16 further includes a foldable flap 21 hingeably secured to the remainder of top portion 16 which in turn supports an attachment pad 24. A second attachment pad 23 is secured to a front panel 17 of base housing 11. Front panel 17 is secured to bottom portion 12 by a hinge 22. Attachment pads 23 and 24 cooperate to provide attachment of flap 21 in an overlapping relationship to the upper edge of front panel 17. A pair of zipper attachments constructed in accordance with conventional fabrication techniques secure the side edges of front panel 17 to sides 14 and 13 of base housing 11. Attachment pads 23 and 24 preferably comprise conventional hook and loop fabric attachment pads or the like. Alternatively, attachment pads 23 and 24 may utilize cooperating mechanical fasteners such as snap fasteners or, by still further alternative, utilize cooperating magnetic elements.

Front panel 17 comprises a pair of transparent plastic layers having a separation therebetween. A quantity of liquid 50 is captivated within the interior between the layers of front panel 17.

The interior of base housing 11 defines a first floor room 40 and a pair of upstairs rooms 41 and 42. Rooms 41 and 42 are separated by an interior partition 44. First floor room 40 and upstairs rooms 41 and 42 are separated by a combination ceiling and floor surface 43. Rooms 40, 41 and 42 are open on the sides thereof corresponding to front panel 17. First floor room 40 further includes a movable fence 25 slidably received within room 40 and having an opening gate 26 formed therein. Similarly, upstairs rooms 41 and 42 support slidably movable balcony railings

45 and 46. A pair of zipper tabs 32 and 33 are operative to provide closure and opening of zippers 30 and 31 respectively.

In the closed configuration shown in Figure 1, front panel 17 is raised upwardly about hinge 22 and secured to sides 14 and 13 by zippers 30 and 31 respectively. In the closed configuration, flap 21 is folded downwardly to overlies the upper portion of front panel 17 and is secured in place by the cooperation of attachment pads 23 and 24. While not seen in Figure 1, it will be understood that a quantity of toy items such as dolls and accessories therefor may be supported within rooms 40, 41 and 42 in the closed configuration to provide convenient storage and transport.

Figure 2 sets forth a perspective view of combination playhouse 10 in its open or play configuration. As described above, the configuration of playhouse 10 in the open position for use as a play environment is facilitated by the use of zippers 30 and 31 in folding front panel 17 forwardly to lie in front of the open faces of base housing 11.

More specifically, a combination playhouse and doll carrying case constructed in accordance with the present invention is generally referenced by numeral 10. Playhouse 10 includes a generally rectangular base housing 11 having a pair of vertical sides 13 and 14 together with a bottom surface 12 and a rear surface 15. Base housing 11 further includes a top surface 16 which supports a carrying handle 20. Top surface 16 further includes a foldable flap 21 hingeably secured to the remainder of top portion 16 which in turn supports an attachment pad 24. A

second attachment pad 23 is secured to a front panel 17 of base housing 11. Front panel 17 is secured to bottom portion 12 by a hinge 22. Attachment pads 23 and 24 cooperate to provide attachment of flap 21 in an overlapping relationship to the upper edge of front panel 17. A pair of zipper attachments constructed in accordance with conventional fabrication techniques secure the side edges of front panel 17 to sides 14 and 13 of base housing 11. Attachment pads 23 and 24 preferably comprise conventional hook and loop fabric attachment pads or the like. Alternatively, attachment pads 23 and 24 may utilize cooperating mechanical fasteners such as snap fasteners or, by still further alternative, utilize cooperating magnetic elements.

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The interior of base housing 11 defines a first floor room 40 and a pair of upstairs rooms 41 and 42. Rooms 41 and 42 are separated by an interior partition 44. First floor room 40 and upstairs rooms 41 and 42 are separated by a combination ceiling and floor surface 43. Rooms 40, 41 and 42 are open on the sides thereof corresponding to front panel 17. First floor room 40 further includes a movable fence 25 slidably received within room 40 and having an opening gate 26 formed therein. Similarly, upstairs rooms 41 and 42 support slidably movable balcony railings 45 and 46. A pair of zipper tabs 32 and 33 are operative to provide closure and opening of zippers 30 and 31 respectively.



With temporary reference again to Figure 1, it will be noted that zipper tabs 32 and 33 may be pulled downwardly in the directions indicated by arrows 34 and 35 to open zippers 30 and 31 respectively. Returning to Figure 2, zipper tabs 32 and 33 having been moved downwardly to the bottom of zippers 30 and 31 (seen in Figure 1), front panel 17 is now folded outwardly and forwardly about hinge 22 to provide a play mat in the front portion of base housing 11.

In further accordance with the anticipated play pattern of the present invention, balconies 45 and 46 are slidable outwardly in the direction indicated by arrow 47 to expand upstairs rooms 41 and 42 and to provide an amusing and interesting set of upper balcony environments.

Similarly, fence 25 and gate 26 are also slidable outwardly in the direction indicated by arrow 48 to further expand the play environment provided by first floor room 40. In addition, gate 26 is opened by pivoting downwardly to the configuration shown in Figure 2. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the opening of front panel 17 is a simple pivoting movement about hinge 22 as indicated by arrow 60. Thereafter, front panel 17 lies or rests upon the underlying play surface such as a floor or table without further need of support by base housing 11. In accordance with the present invention, front panel 17 is fabricated of a pair of transparent layers 61 and 62 (seen in Figure 3) having a space defined therebetween. A quantity of liquid 50 which is in the preferred environment of the present invention generally tinted or colored is captivated within the interior space of front panel 17. In the beach playhouse theme of combination playhouse 10 illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, liquid 50 is preferably tinted or colored a slight blue color to replicate a waterfront environment. In addition, either or both of layers 61 and 62 may

be suitably enhanced by image elements such as fish or the like to further replicate an oceanfront or beach environment. By way of example, a fish image 70 is shown upon layer 61 in Figure 2.

In accordance with an anticipated play pattern for the present invention combination  
5 playhouse, the flexible character of front panel 17 together with liquid 50 therein is utilized to provide a finger tip responsive surface which undulates in a similar fashion to ocean waves or the like.

Figure 3 set forth a section view of front panel 17 taken along section lines 3-3 in Figure  
10 2. As described above, front panel 17 is preferably formed of a pair of flexible clear plastic layers 61 and 62 supporting an attachment pad 23 and joined to the remainder of base housing 11 by a hinge 22. A space 63 is formed between layers 61 and 62 which defines a sealed liquid retaining space. Accordingly, a quantity of liquid 50 is captivated within space 63 between layers 61 and 62. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that front panel 17 may be fabricated in the  
15 manner provided above in other liquid captive elements. The essential aspect of front panel 17 is the use of sealed edges on all four sides to captivate liquid 50 therein. This sealed attachment may be provided by conventional fabrication means such as thermal or sonic welding or adhesive attachment as desired.

20 The resulting combination playhouse and doll carrying case allows the user to enjoy a simulated waterfront or beachfront playhouse without any exposure to potential problems of spillage or the like associated with other water play toys.

Combination playhouse 10 may be returned to the carrying configuration shown in Figure 1 by simply sliding balconies 45 and 46 inwardly and by sliding fence 25 inwardly and raising gate 26. Thereafter, suitable articles which are to be carried and stored such as dolls or doll accessories (not shown) may be conveniently deposited within rooms 40, 41 and 42. Finally, front panel 17 is pivoted upwardly about hinge 22 aligning zippers 30 and 31 for closure. Finally, with flap 21 folded upwardly, front panel 17 is secured by raising zipper tabs 32 and 33 to provide zipper attachments afterwhich flap 21 is folded downwardly and secured by the cooperation of attachment pads 23 and 24. At this point, articles within rooms 40, 41 and 42 are secure and the combination playhouse may be conveniently carried using handle 20.

While particular embodiments of the invention have been shown and described, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that changes and modifications may be made without departing from the invention in its broader aspects. Therefore, the aim in the appended claims is to cover all such changes and modifications as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.